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UNCLAS ADANA 000030

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DEMONSTRATORS CLASH WITH POLICE IN SIIRT

REF: ADANA 0018

¶1. (U) Per reftel (SE Turkey Press Summary 1/25/05), as many as 1000 demonstrators reportedly clashed with security officials in Siirt on January 23, 2005. Reportedly throwing stones and breaking windows, they protested what they claimed was a decision by government and municipal officials to block the burial in Siirt township of alleged PKK militants Nergis Ozer and Sibal Saltik, who allegedly were killed by security forces in Sirnak last weekend. (Note: In March 2004, the AK Party won the mayoralty of Siirt, previously held by the pro-Kurdish DEHAP party. The current AKP Mayor of Siirt originally was elected to Parliament but vacated his seat to allow current Prime Minister Erdogan to run in a by-election and formally, therefore, join the Parliament and be chosen as Prime Minister. End note.)

¶2. (U) Family members who reportedly had recovered the bodies in nearby Sirnak province were transporting the deceased to Siirt for burial, but were stopped from entering the town by as yet unidentified GOT forces. The two bodies were reportedly seized by Jandarma and transported to nearby Eruh, where they were buried against the families' wishes. In the resulting protests, press reports indicate that up to 10 police were injured, and that police launched tear gas canisters to disperse the crowd.

¶3. (SBU) A human rights activist in Siirt reports that tensions there remained high through mid-week as detentions related to the incident continued, but that by January 27 the mood in the town was considerably calmer. On January 28 a Diyarbakir-based lawyer told poloff that a Human Rights Association (HRA) delegation had traveled to Sirnak on January 25 to investigate the circumstances under which the two alleged militants and three others were killed. Their report also addresses the families' complaints about government handling of their family members' burial. (Note: The two alleged PKK militants, whose burials sparked the demonstrations in Siirt, were both female and reportedly aged 23 and 16. According to HRA, among others killed in the same clash/incident were two individuals aged 21, and one other, aged 13. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Amcon Adana has not been able to determine definitively some of the key facts in this case; poloff will travel to Siirt in the coming week to follow up on the case. As an aside, the incident casts light on continuing grassroots sympathy for PKK/KG in parts of southeast Turkey, especially in rural areas, and sheds further light on the participation of women and youth in reported PKK/KG units. End comment.

¶5. (U) BAGHDAD MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

REID